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Chairman: Mr. PETRESKI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 96: ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (continued)

(f) INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION

AGENDA ITEM 98: TRAINING AND RESEARCH: UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTE FOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH

AGENDA ITEM 95: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION (continued)

(d) SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (continued)

(j) UNITED NATIONS INITIATIVE ON OPPORTUNITY AND PARTICIPATION (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 96: ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (continued)

(f) INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION (A/50/201-E/1995/74, A/50/521, A/50/526; A/C.2/50/L.35)

1. Mr. ELO (Director of the secretariat for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction) said that a year had passed since the General Assembly had received the report of the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction held in Yokohama in May 1994, and during that time the secretariat for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction had joined with its partners in the International Framework of Action for the Decade to formulate a precise action plan for the rest of the Decade by redefining essential thematic areas and further strengthening cooperation.

2. Although natural disasters remained inevitable for a number of reasons, powerful technological resources existed to mitigate their effects. Moreover, international technical cooperation was being developed and awareness of the problem was growing among all sectors of society. The recent earthquakes in the Red Sea area, the Eastern Mediterranean and Kobe, the typhoon which had devastated part of the Philippines and the hurricanes which had hit the United States had elicited a positive and concerted reaction from all the bodies concerned.

3. The first of the three reports of the Secretary-General currently before the Committee (A/50/201) focused on the progress that had been made in implementing General Assembly resolution 49/22 A and the recommendations of the mid-term review of the implementation of the International Framework of Action for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The report, which had been endorsed by the 1995 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, outlined the activities which had been carried out since the World Conference at Yokohama and the programme for the period 1995-2000, which centred around the development of national capacities, the application of knowledge and technology, information management and international collaboration.

4. The second report of the Secretary-General on the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (A/50/521), which had been compiled pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/47 B, was complementary to report A/50/201, particularly with regard to funding options for the Decade based on the annex to General Assembly resolution 44/236 and the experience gained during the first five years of the Decade. Specifically, the Decade's donor base should be broadened; efforts should be made to generate private sector funding; long-term funding should be guaranteed for the second half of the Decade; better use should be made of the Decade's Trust Fund; the possibility of employing experts seconded from Governments, the United Nations system and the private sector should be looked into; and coordination should be strengthened within the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

5. The third report on the early-warning capacities of the United Nations system with regard to natural disasters (A/50/526) suggested various ways to

improve and better coordinate international early-warning capacities and also addressed the role of communications. Each country needed to assess its early-warning needs and capacities in conjunction with the specialized agencies concerned.

6. He also wished to mention the more technical report compiled by the Decade's Scientific and Technical Committee, reports by other bodies and regional workshops in Africa, and a newsletter for children produced in six languages with a total circulation of 60,000.

7. The success of the Decade would not be measured by the number of documents produced but by the extent to which the participation of partners in the International Framework of Action for the Decade would ensure greater safety for individuals and communities threatened by natural disasters. In his report on the agenda for development (A/48/935), the Secretary-General had recognized that natural disasters could have an enormous and dramatic impact on development efforts, and therefore planning must focus on ways to cushion their effects and enable victims of natural disasters to avoid perpetual dependence on external assistance.

8. Mr. TENA (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the General Assembly should not repeat the debate on the International Decade for Disaster Reduction which had already taken place during the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council.

9. The European Union welcomed the consensus reflected in Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/47 and looked forward to further cooperating with all countries and relevant organizations in order to further the prevention and mitigation of natural disasters. It also welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on enhancing the early-warning capacities of the United Nations system with regard to natural disasters (A/50/526) and supported the proposal to establish an informal early-warning mechanism to continue that enhancement as outlined in the same report and in draft resolution A/C.2/50/L.35, which would be presented and sponsored by the European Union.

10. Mr. MURAOKA (Japan) said that his delegation was strongly committed to the promotion of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and supported the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World, which had been endorsed by the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session. Specifically, he believed that the Plan of Action which had been elaborated at that session should be implemented as part of the International Framework of Action for the Decade, and expressed his delegation's concern regarding the financial weakness of the Decade's secretariat.

11. His Government intended to continue providing assistance through contributions to the Trust Fund and seconding staff to the secretariat. Concerning early-warning capacities, his delegation had noted in particular the final observation of the report of the Secretary-General (A/50/526) and stressed that, to be successful, the concluding event of the Decade would require the cooperation of all the parties concerned, including Member States and international organizations.

12. Mr. RØNNEBERG (Marshall Islands) presented his condolences to the Republic of the Philippines and other Asian countries, and also to Caribbean countries and the United States which had recently been struck by devastating hurricanes.

13. His Government had been very active in implementing the principles of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, in particular by developing an early-warning system based on the Decade's recommendations and advocating the use of storm-resistant materials. Those efforts had not proved entirely successful owing to a lack of funds, and international economic assistance could prove useful in that respect. Given the frequency and severity of major storms, measures associated with the Framework Convention on Climate Change could make a significant contribution to preventing the climate-related disasters that posed a direct threat to the countries of the Alliance of Small Island States.

14. Regarding the risks posed by man-made disasters, and mindful that a number of other delegations had already raised the issue, he merely wished to reiterate that his delegation had called for the full implementation of the resolution on nuclear testing recently adopted by the First Committee (A/C.1/50/L.3).

15. His delegation fully supported the programme of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and looked forward to further cooperation with other States in the Pacific region with a view to strengthening prevention capacities in line with the agreed criteria and with the support of the international community. His delegation therefore wished to become a sponsor of draft resolution A/C.2/50/L.35.

16. Mrs. ARYSTANBEKOVA (Kazakstan) said that international cooperation under the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction was particularly important to her country which, for a number of reasons, was affected by a wide range of natural and technological disasters, including the shrinking of the Aral Sea.

17. As part of a long-term programme adopted by the Government in 1994, the national natural disaster prevention and disaster relief system of Kazakstan was studying natural disasters, establishing an observation network, developing forecasting methods, stockpiling for relief operations and improving telecommunications. A bill was being drafted on the protection of the population and the environment against natural disasters, which would constitute the legal basis for national machinery for the prevention of natural disasters.

18. Kazakstan was actively developing its cooperation with other States at both the bilateral and regional levels, especially in the area of seismology. The Institute of Seismology of the National Academy of Sciences maintained close contacts with relevant agencies in China, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, the United States and Uzbekistan. As a result of assistance from the United Nations, her country had been able to attend the major international conferences on natural disaster reduction. Germany had provided particularly valuable assistance in the area of training by financing courses during the period 1993-1995.

19. Kazakstan was also developing cooperation with other States within the framework of the Inter-State Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States

for Disaster Relief and Coordination and of a tripartite cooperation agreement with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. However, it was only with the support of the United Nations that cooperation could really be fruitful especially with respect to earthquakes, to which the States of Central Asia were particularly prone. A special programme established under the auspices of the United Nations would make it possible to coordinate and effectively work towards minimizing the impact of earthquakes by taking into account the experience, traditions and ways of life of the peoples of Central Asia.

20. Kazakstan, which had both scientific and practical experience in the area of earthquake-resistant construction, had proposed the establishment at Almaty, under the auspices of the United Nations, of an international centre for the study of earthquake-resistant construction techniques and seismology. The secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Diaster Reduction had already welcomed that proposal. It would also be useful, in view of the frequency of natural disasters in Central Asia, for the United Nations to establish a regional centre for the storage of emergency items to respond to the needs of the population.

21. A systematic examination of progress achieved in international cooperation in the area of natural disaster prevention was essential for the strengthening of mutual assistance machineries established under the Decade. It was therefore important to put that issue on the agenda of the annual sessions of the General Assembly.

22. Ms. YANG Yanyi (China) said that, as early as 1989, as part of the activities related to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, her Government had established the China National Committee for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, which organized and coordinated the work of 28 ministries and commissions. Disaster reduction efforts had been stepped up and education campaigns had been undertaken to increase public awareness of the importance of the issue.

23. Her Government attached great importance to the integration of natural disaster reduction into its national development plan and China's first programme for disaster reduction had been developed jointly by the China National Committee for the International Decade and the State Planning Commission. The various functional departments of the China National Committee for the International Decade had made considerable headway in disaster management as well as in the forecasting of natural disasters.

24. China was also working on improving early-warning capabilities at the central and local levels. She had taken note of the Secretary-General's proposal concerning the transfer of early-warning technology in that field which was of crucial importance to developing countries. Her country, which had a well-equipped national centre for national construction and disaster reduction, could contribute considerably to the strengthening of international cooperation and the exchange of relevant experience.

25. China had thus already proceeded to a new stage where it attached importance to priority setting and stressed practical results. Since the launching of the Decade, her Government had established fruitful cooperation

with the relevant United Nations agencies, which were doing very useful work in relation to natural disaster reduction, and with other Member States. Finally, consideration should be given to the elaboration of an agenda for the prevention of natural disasters in the twenty-first century.

26. Mr. KUDRYAVTSEV (Russian Federation) said that the contemporary situation amply illustrated the importance of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. About 60 major natural disasters had occurred in 1995, that had left thousands dead and countless people homeless. Nature did not choose its victims. Disasters hit the most developed as well as the poorest countries, however, the former were able to overcome the effects of the disasters more rapidly using their own resources. In any case, it was the common task of all countries to enhance the level of preparedness of the international community and the regions and countries most prone to specific natural disasters, as well as to intensify collective efforts with a view to prevention. That was why it was important to strengthen early warning and information systems, including the use of the possibilities offered by United Nations agencies. In that regard, he had noted with interest that, having considered the report of the Secretary-General on the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (A/50/201), the Economic and Social Council had stressed the importance of further international cooperation in developing reliable telecommunications systems for the alleviation of the effects of natural disasters, with the cooperation of the secretariat of the Decade, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the International Telecommunication Union.

27. Earthquake forecasting was particularly important both under the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and as part of the activities of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. That problem required the focused efforts of multi-disciplinary scientists and specialists. First of all, a universally acceptable technical methodology needed to be developed with regard to short-term forecasting. The goal of current projects was to create a reliable international system of earthquake forecasting and an early-warning network. A radio wave network, supplemented by mechanisms indicating the state of the earth's surface in several countries and by the exchange of data among all countries, seemed to be particularly promising in that regard. That would make it possible to determine well in advance the timing, strength and site of earthquakes. The Russian methodology of identifying electro-magnetic effects of seismic origin in the structure of natural fields could be used and a system could be created on the basis of the earth surface monitoring systems available in some countries, including the Russian Federation. Many experiments had confirmed the possibility of sufficiently reliable forecasting of earthquakes several days in advance and the accuracy of the forecast could be increased.

28. His delegation proposed that the issue of earthquake forecasting should be included in the agenda of the Decade secretariat. International cooperation could also be envisaged in that field as part of collective efforts aimed at strengthening the early warning potential.

Draft resolution A/C.2/50/L.35

29. Mr. RUNGE (Germany) introduced draft resolution A/C.2/50/L.35 entitled "International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction" on behalf of its sponsors.

Recalling that in its resolution 49/22 B the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to it at its fiftieth session on early-warning capacities within the United Nations system, he stated that the draft resolution, which was brief and action-oriented, was based on the conclusion that the Secretary-General had drawn in paragraph 136 (a) of his report (A/50/526) concerning the need for an informal mechanism to develop international doctrine and operational standards for improved and better-coordinated global early-warning analysis, forecasting and dissemination.

AGENDA ITEM 98: TRAINING AND RESEARCH: UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTE FOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH (A/50/539)

30. Mrs. MILLS (Director of Financial Management, Department of Administration and Management) said that since the Committee had decided that issues relating to the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) would be considered on a biennial basis, the Secretary-General would submit only an oral report on the issue during the current year.

31. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 47/227, the headquarters of the Institute had been transferred to Geneva in July 1993. Similarly, the Secretary-General had complied with paragraph 4 of resolution 49/125, concerning the provision of office space for the Institute in Geneva as well as administrative and logistic support. Paragraph 5 of the same resolution provided for a liaison office to be set up in New York, a matter which had been entrusted to the Board of Trustees with a view to avoiding any negative financial impact on the Institute. The Board of Trustees, as indicated in its report (A/50/539), treated the issue as a priority. As the financial situation of the Institute had improved, the Board had initiated preliminary discussions on procedures for setting up the office. However, it was understood that related expenditure would be covered by the Institute's resources and that the Board of Trustees would ensure that funds were available for that purpose before proceeding to establish the liaison office. It was noteworthy that the Secretary-General had instructed the Head of the Training Service to arrange for coordination of the training programmes offered in New York.

32. In paragraph 7 of resolution 49/125, the Assembly had also requested the Secretary-General to strengthen the cooperation between the Institute and other qualified national and international institutions, including the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Turin. The Board of Trustees had set up a subcommittee to study the matter. The Institute was currently envisaging offering a training programme on international trade in collaboration with the World Trade Organization. Other subjects were also being considered, and, in the interests of efficiency, the Institute was continuing to study the possibility of using the facilities in Turin.

33. Mr. GÓMEZ ACEBO (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union, expressed satisfaction that a solution had been found for financing office space for UNITAR in Geneva, as that was an important step towards the Institute's financial recovery.

34. The European Union welcomed the Institute's decision to focus its activities on priority areas. The Institute should strive to provide better

information to Member States and establish closer ties of cooperation with other United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations University and the International Training Centre of ILO in Turin, and with other agencies in order to optimize the use of resources for training. The Secretary-General, for his part, should continue his coordinated approach to training activities.

35. The European Union considered that the appointment of an executive director would enable the Institute to overcome certain difficulties affecting its stability.

36. Mr. MURAOKA (Japan) said that his country, which was one of the major donors to the Institute, intended to make a contribution of $100,000 again in 1995. He therefore welcomed the dramatic improvement in the Institute's financial situation and management resulting from the restructuring measures, although the establishment of a sound financial base for UNITAR had yet to be achieved.

37. UNITAR should continue to place emphasis on its programmes for developing countries, whose need for training was the most crucial. However, based on the experience of Japanese officers who had benefited from a UNITAR fellowship programme, his Government felt that the Institute, in order to strengthen its financial base, should also take into consideration, while maintaining that priority, the interests of developed countries which were potential donors.

38. As far as improving management was concerned, his delegation welcomed the agreement relating to the financing of the headquarters office of the Institute. It supported the conclusions of the Board of Trustees concerning the establishment of a liaison office which would be responsible for programmes in great demand in New York. However, in the interests of efficiency, it was important to avoid any unnecessary expansion.

39. In future, the Institute should first endeavour to improve its efficiency in order to attract sufficient contributions from Member States. It should then continue to develop its activities without placing undue emphasis on areas that might result in a reduction in the valuable support it received from Member States. Lastly and most important, it was crucial to maintain sound financial management and remain vigilant against any return to the lax practices of the past.

40. Mr. ISSAKOV (Russian Federation) welcomed the efforts made pursuant to resolution 49/925 to increase the efficiency of UNITAR. Since the transfer of the Institute to Geneva, progress had been achieved mainly through rigorous administrative and financial measures. Training programmes in various areas had improved in quality. His delegation was also pleased that UNITAR had extended its activities to certain countries in transition, for example by offering training programmes for specialists in international economic and financial relations in various countries of central Asia. His Government, for its part, would be willing to provide the services of lecturers for such programmes on a contractual basis to members of the Commonwealth of Independent States as well as to other countries. Cooperation between UNITAR and the Russian Federation could also be considerably strengthened in other areas. For example, there were staff training programmes organized by government institutes involved in

international cooperation, and in particular a programme for diplomats. It would be useful if the secretariat of UNITAR could supply information on possible areas of cooperation in that respect.

41. As for short-term measures for increasing the efficiency of UNITAR, it would be advisable for the Institute to define the broad outline of its activities for the period 1996-2000. An ad hoc working group should design a project, which the Board of Trustees would examine at its next session and submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session.

42. His delegation also noted with concern that the Secretary-General had not yet confirmed the appointment of the members of the UNITAR Board of Trustees. The question of the confirmation of Mr. Boisard as Executive Director had not yet been settled.

43. His delegation endorsed the proposal for the establishment of a UNITAR office in New York, on the understanding that there would be no financial implications for the regular budget. Such a measure would substantially improve links with Headquarters and would enable the Institute to expand its information activities.

44. Mrs. YANG Yanyi (China) said that UNITAR had been able to adapt its work in the light of the major changes which had occurred in the world. On the one hand, in addition to its programmes on preventive diplomacy, peace-keeping and multilateral diplomacy, it had given greater weight to programmes pertaining to economic development (international finance, debt, disaster relief, environment, population and human settlements). On the other hand, in the context of its follow-up activities to the series of major United Nations conferences on economic and social issues, it had focused on methodology by encouraging inter-agency cooperation in training and research.

45. With regard to institutional matters, her delegation welcomed the impending opening of a liaison office in New York, which would encourage coordination and cooperation between the Institute and the relevant organs and bodies of the United Nations system and would enable the Institute to improve its programmes so that it could respond more effectively to the needs of developing countries with regard to the training of diplomats in such areas as negotiation skills, policy setting and information gathering.

46. As to financial matters, the lack of resources remained a concern, although the reform efforts of recent years had helped to stabilize the financial situation of the Institute. Her delegation called on the international community to make more generous contributions to the General Fund of the Institute, which currently was unable to meet urgent training and resource needs. Her country would continue to support the work of UNITAR during its consolidation phase.

47. Mrs. WONG (Australia) said that her country continued to support UNITAR, whose multi-disciplinary approach and high-quality efforts earned it a special niche in the field of training and research. Its recent training activities, particularly in the field of preventive diplomacy, international law and environmental conventions, could serve as a model for the focus and conduct of

future programmes. One example was the programme of fellowships in preventive diplomacy and peacemaking referred to in the summary of UNITAR's ongoing activities (A/50/539).

48. Now that UNITAR had completed its restructuring process and was entering a phase of consolidation, her delegation believed that the principle of the Institute's autonomy should be reaffirmed to allow it the necessary administrative and operational flexibility for the conduct of its activities. However, the Institute's financial stability had been achieved only through drastic measures which had particulary affected staff. Member States should therefore increase their contributions to the General Fund in order to ensure the long-term continuity of the Institute and the development of its important training function. The appointment of the Executive Director should be confirmed as well.

49. In 1996, the Board of Trustees of UNITAR, of which Australia was a member, would undertake a review of its current programmes and would re-examine future objectives and requirements in the light of the successful restructuring of the Institute and the increasing demands for its services. It was also important to ensure closer collaboration between the United Nations funds and programmes and the Institute, which was called upon to carry out training and research activities in its areas of expertise, and any duplication of effort among the bodies concerned must be avoided. In that connection, and in the light of the ninth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 1996, it would be useful to discuss the best way to utilize the comparative advantage of each body in the provision of training programmes in the field of trade.

50. Lastly, her delegation welcomed the impending opening of a UNITAR liaison office in New York pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/227 and within existing resources.

51. Mrs. JUNEJO (Pakistan) said that the major objective of UNITAR, which was to provide training in the fields of multilateral diplomacy and economic and social development, was even more relevant because the practitioners of multilateral diplomacy had to contend with an ever-increasing number of new and highly complex issues. Her country had benefited immensely from the training programmes conducted by the Institute, which were tailored to the particular needs of different countries and regions, and was particularly interested in the training project on all issues pertaining to the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations. Officials from new member States of the World Trade Organization (WTO) would be able to learn about the complex modalities of joining WTO, negotiations on anti-dumping regulations and conflict resolution and about questions relating to trade and environment.

52. The functioning of the Institute had improved significantly in recent years as a result of the stabilization of its financial situation and the elimination of its deficit. It was important to ensure that the drastic administrative and budgetary measures applied by UNITAR did not impair its training activities, to which end member States should increase their contributions to the General Fund. Her delegation also welcomed the establishment of a liaison office in New York pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/227, and believed that the current post of Acting Executive Director should be replaced by the post of Executive

Director in order to accord a more permanent status to the Institute's highest official. Her country would continue the work it had accomplished as a member of the Board of Trustees to strengthen the functioning of the Institute.

AGENDA ITEM 95: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION (continued)

Draft resolution A/C.2/50/L.40

53. Mr. CABACTULAN (Philippines), speaking on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that were members of the Group of 77 and China, introduced draft resolution A/C.2/50/L.40 entitled "Second Industrial Development Decade for Africa". The primary purpose of the draft resolution was to accelerate the implementation of the programme for the Second Decade (which had been the subject of General Assembly resolution 49/107) and to make the international community aware of the considerable importance of industrialization in Africa, through the increased mobilization of resources and new initiatives at the local and international levels.

(d) SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (continued)

Draft resolution A/C.2/50/L.38

54. Mr. CABACTULAN (Philippines), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, introduced draft resolution A/C.2/50/L.38 entitled "United Nations system support for science and technology in Africa" and noted that, in contrast to the other draft resolution on science and technology submitted by the Group of 77 and China, which was general in nature, the document under consideration focused more particularly on matters of direct interest to the African continent.

(j) UNITED NATIONS INITIATIVE ON OPPORTUNITY AND PARTICIPATION (continued)

Draft resolution A/C.2/50/L.36

55. Mr. DELANEY (Papua New Guinea) introduced draft resolution A/C.2/50/L.36 entitled "United Nations initiative on opportunity and participation" on behalf of the sponsors, among whom Australia should have been listed, and who had been joined by Benin and Singapore. The draft resolution was based primarily on the report of the Panel on Opportunity and Participation and was a procedural follow-up to General Assembly resolution 48/60, from which it incorporated a number of elements which had already been the object of a consensus. The draft resolution had been elaborated at the end of extensive informal consultations. In the light of the reforms under way in the United Nations, it did not entail any new institutional arrangements or additional funding in the regular budget. Even though few countries which were members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) had become sponsors, the text had elicited sufficient positive feedback to engender the hope that it would be supported by most members of the Committee.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.